

INDIA'S NAVAL MODERNIZATION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION: ANALYZING THE COMMISSIONING OF THE NEW NAVAL BASE, INS JATAYU

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Abstract

Naval modernization in the Indian Ocean Region is a prerequisite in the contemporary era. Indian naval modernization is an important development in the IOR, driven by the geopolitical shift. Amidst China's increasing involvement in the Indian Ocean, India has heightened its attention to strengthening its naval capacities in the region. India's growing maritime influence raises concerns for Pakistan, a security-maximizing state that prioritizes its security amidst India's growing influence. India's advantageous geography and formidable naval strength allow it to dominate the region, significantly impacting relations with neighbouring states. This article explores the repercussions of Indian naval modernization on Pakistan, particularly in light of the establishment of the recent naval base in the Arabian Sea, the INS Jatayu. Furthermore, the analysis will extend to include the implications for Pakistan, examining the changing Indo-Maldives relations alongside the commissioning of the naval base.

Keywords: Indian Ocean, India's Naval Modernization, Naval Base, Pakistan's Security Concerns, Indo-Maldives Relations

Introduction

The ocean is the third largest body of water on the globe, exceeding the Southern and Arctic oceans, but smaller than the Atlantic and Pacific,¹ and covers approximately 70 per cent of the Earth's

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¹ "The World Factbook- Indian Ocean," *Central Intelligence Agency*, August 16, 2024, Indian Ocean - The World Factbook (cia.gov)

surface.² This ocean is inhabited by around 2.7 billion individuals. This region is filled with natural resources, featuring essential fish stocks, and hosts developing economies. The Indian Ocean provides 40 per cent of the world's offshore oil production and acts as a pathway for 80 per cent of global transportation. The Indian Ocean covers regions in the Middle East, Africa, East Asia, Europe, and the Americas.³ Around 8 in 10 ships transit through the waters, connecting the IO to the outside environment.⁴

The total expanse of the Indian Ocean measures 70.56 million sq km, nearly seven times larger than the United States. It shares a coastline of 66, 526 km. It consists of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman Sea, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Aden, the Timor Sea, the Savu Sea, the Red Sea, the Mozambique Channel, the Great Australian Bight, and other associated waterways. The four critical waterways of the IO are the Suez Canal, the Bab-el-Mandeb between Djibouti and Yemen, and the Strait of Malacca between Indonesia and Malaysia, Strait of Hormuz between Iran and Oman.⁵ They are of utmost economic importance. The crucial routes in the Indian Ocean play a vital role in its evolving strategic landscape, as their obstruction could disrupt the global economy. Hosting some of the rapidly developing economies, the Indian Ocean region gains importance.⁶

Historically, the IO has been navigated by ancient civilizations such as China, India, the Middle East, and European powers. In the past, the ocean has been a conduit for trade and cultural exchanges.⁷ This is the sole ocean that derives its name from a country.⁸ This region also faces security threats like piracy, terrorism, and illegal fishing.⁹ This maritime area is

² "All About the Ocean," *National Geographic*, All About the Ocean (nationalgeographic.org)

³ Alexander E. Davis and Jonathan N Balls, "The Indian Ocean Region in the 21st Century: Geopolitical, Economic, and Environmental Ties," *Australia India Institute*, indian-ocean-report.pdf

⁴ Nilanthi Samaranyake, "Why the US Wants to Step UP Engagement in the Indian Ocean," *USIP*, May 24, 2023, Why the U.S. Wants to Step Up Engagement in the Indian Ocean | United States Institute of Peace (usip.org)

⁵ "The World Fact Book."

⁶ Ulrich Jochheim and Rita Barbosa Lobo "Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Major Players' Strategic Perspectives," *European Parliamentary Research Service*, July 2023, Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Major players' strategic perspectives (europa.eu)

⁷ Shubham Yadav, "Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean," *Geographic Book*, Last modified May 19, 2024, Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean - Geographic Book

⁸ "The World Fact Book – Indian Ocean," *CIA*, Last modified December 14, 2021, Indian Ocean - 2021 World Factbook Archive (cia.gov).

⁹ Yadav, "Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean."

prone to piracy threats and seems to remain the same with the largest security challenges.¹⁰

The region is experiencing geopolitical transformations in the twenty-first century and has become the hub of geopolitical maneuvers by regional and external powers. Today, the IOR has the potential to decide the future of certain powers, particularly China, India, and the US. Realizing this fact, it has been under consideration of each major power. Few other countries also sought to dominate these waters.¹¹

India, as one of the key players, aims to enhance its influence in the Indian Ocean area. The changing security dynamics in the region due to China's ascent have prompted India to upgrade its naval capabilities in the IOR. Given China's progress in the area and the initiation of the BRI project, India found itself compelled to review its maritime strategies in the IOR. New Delhi also expressed its concern about China's debt-trap diplomacy and its bolstered relations with Pakistan.¹²

China's abrupt rise in the Indian Ocean waters prompted both Indian and U.S. policymakers to respond actively, and they started directing their focus to the IOR. The two geopolitical players realized that allowing China's naval expansion to go unchallenged in the region would negatively impact U.S. and Indian interests. New Delhi adopted various measures to deal with its increased regional influence. For instance, it joined the US-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and increased its participation in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). QUAD is not a formal alliance; it is more like a loose grouping involving four countries: India, Japan, Australia, and the US. With China's growing influence, the group has strengthened its economic and security connections.¹³

Major powers have certain stakes in the region, where each actor vies for control. However, to date, the US possesses more power than the rest of the countries. The US, already enjoying predominance in the region, fears its hegemony might be replaced by China. In the same way, perceiving a threat from China's increasing engagements, India aspires to become the regional hegemon.

India and the US share common interests, including addressing China's increasing presence in the region. They are observing China's military expansion in the area and are working together to address this

¹⁰ Rulah Odeh Alsawalqa and Denis Venter, "Piracy and Maritime Security in the North-Western Indian Ocean: From the Gulf of Oman to the Waters off the Somali Coast," *SAGE* 14, no. 1 (2021). Piracy and Maritime Security in the North-Western Indian Ocean: From the Gulf of Oman to the Waters off the Somali Coast - Rulah Odeh Alsawalqa, Denis Venter, 2022 (sagepub.com).

¹¹ Yadav, "Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean."

¹² Jochheim and Lobo, "Major Players' Strategic Perspectives." 6.

¹³ Sheila A. Smith, "The QUAD in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know," *CFR*, May 27, 2021, The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know | Council on Foreign Relations.

challenge. India views the Indian Ocean as its strategic domain, believing it has the right to exert influence in this region, and perceives China's progress as a threat to its interests. China, a country that previously had outdated naval capabilities, has now emerged as one of the most formidable naval forces in the present day. Addressing the concerns regarding China's rise, Beijing asserts that being the second largest economy in the world, it must prioritize economic growth. China aims to secure SLOCs and reduce reliance on the Strait of Malacca to support its economy. This drive has led to increased Chinese presence in the region.

China has been strategically building deep-sea ports in key littoral countries like Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Myanmar, which China claims to be part of its policy initiatives to provide them with regional connectivity. However, the US and India perceive these actions as part of China's Debt-Trap diplomacy, fearing it will primarily benefit China and undermine their interests. According to India and the U.S., China's access to strategic ports in the region is intended to secure them as bases. Additionally, these two countries characterize China's economic activities in the region as a means of debt leverage. They also show concern that by establishing bases around India, China seeks to encircle New Delhi. Under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China is developing the Gwadar Port, which is expected to bring significant advantages to China, enhancing its economic security and influence in the IOR. While on the other hand, it negatively impacts the US' and Indian interests.

Core Argument/Hypothesis

India's commissioning of a new naval base on Minicoy Island in the Indian Ocean Region, amidst strained relations with Maldives, is likely to impact Pakistan's strategic interests in the region, potentially exacerbating the security dilemma between India and Pakistan.

Literature Review

The Indian Ocean has emerged as a critical region in the twenty-first century, with various authors highlighting its strategic importance. Robert D. Kaplan aptly describes it as the "center stage of geopolitics" in the present century.¹⁴ This characterization is shared by Gosh, who emphasizes the region's role as a hub of competition among regional and extra-regional powers.¹⁵ Cuiping Zhu further notes that the fate of stakeholders in the region is intricately linked to the competition among

¹⁴ Kaplan, "Center Stage for the 21st Century Power Plays in the Indian Ocean," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-asia/2009-03-01/center-stage-21st-century>.

¹⁵ Priyanjoli Ghosh, "India's Indian Ocean Region Strategy," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 146.

geopolitical players.¹⁶ Harsh V. Pant also underscores the Indian Ocean's significance as a hub of global power rivalry.¹⁷ The region's importance extends beyond geopolitics, as it is also a critical hub for global trade. The Indian Ocean is home to vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), essential for international trade. Priyanjoli Gosh describes it as the "world's busiest trade route."¹⁸ Kaplan similarly emphasizes the region's role as a hub for global trade.¹⁹ Davis and Balls, and Jochheim and Lobo shed light on the importance of the Indian Ocean, referring to this region as the center of the fastest growing economies. KM Pannikar emphasizes the Indian Ocean's vital importance for India, describing it as a "vital sea."²⁰

The literature on Indian naval modernization presents two distinct perspectives. On one hand, some experts argue that India's naval modernization is driven by the need to secure its trade interests and protect its SLOCs. On the other hand, others contend that the expansion of China's naval capabilities is the primary driver behind New Delhi's naval build-up. Some analysts argue that this naval expansion is a defensive response to China's growing naval presence in the region. However, others contend that India's naval posture has shifted from defensive to offensive in response to China's rise.

Several scholars highlight the significance of the Indian Ocean as a contested region where India's and China's interests collide. As Smith notes, China's rapid expansion in the Indian Ocean has prompted India and the US to strengthen their economic and security ties, particularly among Quad member nations.²¹ Similarly, Vaughn suggests that the rivalry between India and China in the Indian Ocean is a pressing concern, and the rise of China has led to increased competition in the region, with the US and India seeking to counterbalance China's growing influence.²² This

¹⁶ Cuiping Zhu, *India's Ocean: Can China and India Coexist?* (Singapore: Springer, 2017).

¹⁷ Harsh V Pant, "India in the Indian Ocean: Growing Mismatch Between Ambitions and Capabilities," *Pacific Affairs* 82, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 279, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25608866>.

¹⁸ Gosh, "India's Indian Ocean Region Strategy."

¹⁹ Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (New York: Random House, 2010), 6-7.

²⁰ Vice Admiral MP Muralidharan, "Revival of Maritime Outlook in Modern India: The Role of KM Pannikar, IDR, July 9, 2021, https://indiandefencereview.com/revival-of-maritime-outlook-in-modern-india-the-role-of-km-panikkar/#google_vignette.

²¹ Sheila A. Smith, "The QUAD in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know," *CFR*, May 27, 2021, *The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know* | Council on Foreign Relations.

²² Bruce Vaughn, "China-India Great Power Competition in the Indian Ocean Region: Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service*, April 20, 2018.

rivalry is driven by India's perception of China as a threat to its security, as argued by Kaplan. In response, India has increased its military presence in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to counter China's growing influence.²³ Donald L. Berlin observes that India considers the Indian Ocean its "backyard" and aspires to become the regional hegemon.²⁴ Pant further emphasizes that China's rising power is driving India's naval posture, with New Delhi exercising caution in response to Beijing's initiatives to secure its interests.²⁵

While the existing literature on Indian naval modernization extensively explores India's naval upgrades and their implications for Pakistan, it primarily focuses on the motivations behind this modernization, which are largely attributed to China's growing influence. However, a significant gap exists in the current research, as few studies examine the implications of India's recent naval expansions, particularly the commissioning of the INS Jatayu naval base in the Arabian Sea, on Pakistan's security dynamics.

Launching the naval base INS Jatayu is a significant development in this context. It reflects India's efforts to strengthen its naval capabilities and maximize its power in the Indian Ocean. However, this move also has the potential to exacerbate the security dilemma between India and China, highlighting the need for careful management of their rivalry in the region.

Research Methodology

This research employs descriptive and predictive research approaches. Following the qualitative research method, data has been collected through secondary sources for this research to examine the different aspects of the study.

This study faces limitations in terms of access to official Indian documents and archives. Most of the literature examined presents a biased view. Some support India, saying that it is a defensive move in response to China's increased power in the IOR. On the other hand, India has expansionist designs and wants to fulfill its objective. So, a balanced opinion is missing.

Theoretical Framework

Indian naval modernization in the IOR can be viewed through the lens of Offensive realism. Despite possessing a strong naval posture, which

²³ Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House, 2012).

²⁴ Donald L Berlin, "India in the Indian Ocean," *Naval War College Review* 59, no.2 (Spring 2006).

²⁵ Pant, "Sino-Indian Maritime Ambitions Collide in the Indian Ocean," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 1, no. 2 (August 2014): 187-202, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48601777>.

is sufficient to guarantee its security, India continues to pursue naval modernization efforts. This ongoing endeavor suggests that India exhibits offensive behavior, characteristic of a power maximizer. According to John Mearsheimer's theory of Offensive Realism, States are power maximizers. For instance, states are not satisfied with the amount of power they have, and their appetite for power is never fulfilled, therefore, they try to attain maximum power, which is beyond any limit. Moreover, the unlimited pursuit of power is not driven by the need for power in human nature. Rather, the power struggle is due to the anarchic structure of the international system.²⁶ India's recent initiative of commissioning of naval base, INS Jatayu on the Minicoy Island, exemplifies this offensive realist mindset.

India's naval modernization, particularly the establishment of the INS Jatayu base in the Arabian Sea, creates a security dilemma for Pakistan. According to Robert Jervis, a proponent of Defensive Realism, a security dilemma arises when an increase in one state's security inadvertently leads to a decrease in the security of another state. In this context, India's naval expansion and base establishment may heighten Pakistan's sense of insecurity, potentially triggering an arms race or escalating tensions between the two nations.²⁷

Importance of the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean region is of great importance both politically and economically. Economically, the ocean is rich in resources and global trade and commerce. Politically, it serves as a critical area for major powers owing to its geographical location and the presence of crucial SLOCs. Many experts and scholars emphasize the pivotal role of this region. Robert Kaplan notably considers the Indian Ocean to be the focal point of geopolitics in the present day, highlighting its influence on global power dynamics and strategic interests.

Importance of the Indian Ocean for the US

The Indian Ocean Region holds immense significance for the US. It is worth mentioning that this region served as a medium for the US to launch attacks/ military intervention, i.e. in Kuwait, Somalia, and Iraq. Moreover, the United States remained the dominant player in the region since the end of the Cold War, and today, China emerged as a competitor for the US. The US aims to safeguard SLOCs for energy imports and protect trade routes from interference from external powers by maintaining a

²⁶ "Political Realism in International Relations," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, October 9, 2023, 151, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-intl-relations/#KennWaltInteSyst>.

²⁷ Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics* 50, no.1 (October 1997): pp. 171-174, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25054031>.

robust naval presence in the IO. The US has strengthened its position in the IOR by establishing military bases in locations like Diego Garcia and the Persian Gulf. Its strong naval presence not only ensures the protection of American interests and crucial trade routes but also enables greater control.²⁸

Importance of the Indian Ocean for India

India shares its borders with eight countries. The Indian Ocean is located to the south of New Delhi. On its southwest, the Arabian Sea is located and on its southwest, the Bay of Bengal is situated.²⁹ It is blessed with a strategic geographical location and enjoys a home-field advantage. Due to its advantageous geographical location, India has more chances of progress in the maritime realm. It shares a coastline of around 7500 km along the IO.³⁰ Most of India's trade, including around 80 percent of its crude oil and 95 percent of its total trade (by volume) is conducted through sea routes.³¹ This reliance on maritime trade exposes India to various geopolitical challenges.³²

India's Shifting Naval Strategy in the Indian Ocean

India has vested interests in the IOR, evident through its naval presence. In the past, New Delhi remained inactive in the maritime realm for a prolonged period. However, in recent years, it has adopted a pragmatic approach towards the geopolitical realities. In 2007, it released a strategy titled "Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy."³³ Afterward, in 2015, it released a maritime strategy, "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy."³⁴ These strategies underscore India's transition towards securing maritime concerns. The rise of China prompted India to reassess its maritime policies and redefine

²⁸ Khalid Manzoor Butt and Sadaf Jan Siddiqui, "Growing Chinese Presence in the Indian Ocean: Prospects and Challenges," *ISSI*, August 2021, 77, 5_SS_Khalid_Manzoor_Butt_and_Sadaf_Jan_Siddiqui_No-2_2021.pdf.pdf (issi.org.pk).

²⁹ Jochheim and Lobo, "Major Players' Strategic Perspectives," 6.

³⁰ Harshita Kanodia, "India's Sagar Policy in the Indian Ocean Region," *Diplomatist*, December 25, 2020, India's SAGAR Policy in the Indian Ocean Region - Diplomatist.

³¹ Suyesha Dutta, Suvolaxmi Dutta Choudhury, "Balancing Tides : India's Competition with China for Dominance of the Indian Ocean Region," *Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada*, April 24, 2024, India's Competition with China for Dominance of the Indian Ocean (asiapacific.ca).

³² Jochheim and Lobo, "Major Players' Strategic Perspectives," 6.

³³ Darshana M. Baruah, "India's Evolving Maritime Strategy," *The Diplomat*, December 3, 2015, India's Evolving Maritime Strategy - The Diplomat.

³⁴ Kanodia, "India's Sagar Policy in the Indian Ocean Region."

its strategic priorities due to the region's crucial role as a gateway to the world.³⁵

India's Transition to Naval Modernization

After gaining independence, New Delhi pursued a non-aligned policy, staying neutral during the Cold War. The main threats faced by India were from China and Pakistan, both being land-based, which led to a limited focus on naval capabilities development, and New Delhi also remained focused on land-oriented policies.³⁶ India, along with most countries in the Indian subcontinent, initially focused on land-based forces and did not prioritize modernizing their navy. Maritime warfare was not seen as a significant threat; the primary concern was land warfare. The significance of maritime warfare became evident during the British rule over the IO.³⁷

India's Strategic Naval Presence in the Indian Ocean Region

India holds a dominant position in the IO. Thus, the increase in power of any country in the area is perceived as a threat and illegitimate encroachment by New Delhi. Consequently, any rise of another country in this region is viewed as a threat and an unauthorized intrusion. Some strategic experts refer to this as India's 'Monroe Doctrine.'³⁸ To protect international shipping routes from potential threats, the Indian Navy has significantly increased its presence in the Gulf of Aden and the Western Arabian Sea. With a fleet of twelve warships, two advanced ships are strategically positioned in the Gulf of Aden, with the remaining ten strategically stationed across the Northern and Western Arabian Seas.³⁹ As per a Press release, the Indian Navy is actively overseeing the maritime security situation in the North/Central Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

³⁵ Dhruva Jaishankar, "Indian Ocean Region: A Pivot for India's Growth," *Brookings*, September 12, 2016, Indian Ocean: Key to India's Economic Growth (brookings.edu).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Anirban Sen, "India's Role in the Indian Ocean Region and its Links to the Indo-Pacific," *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 27, no.1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984231164457>.

³⁸ Alik Naha, "Geostrategic Significance of the Bay of Bengal in India's Maritime Security Discourse," June 2022, *Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies* 9, no. 2, (2022): 50, (PDF) Geostrategic Significance of the Bay of Bengal in India's Maritime Security Discourse (researchgate.net).

³⁹ Khyati Singh and Gaurav Sen, "India's Anti-Piracy Missions were Years in the Making," *The Diplomat*, February 29, 2024, India's Anti-Piracy Missions Were Years in the Making – The Diplomat.

The Indian naval vessels and aircraft are continuously on the mission to enhance surveillance and conduct maritime security operations.⁴⁰

India's Maritime Infrastructure Development Initiatives

India also adopted various initiatives to strengthen its strong foothold in the region. For instance, the SAGARMALA project aimed at port development, which would not only facilitate the strengthening India's economy but also enhance its power.⁴¹ Another development on behalf of India is the progress of Chahbahar Port, which aims to provide passage to Central Asian states and Afghanistan. The development of this port is a threat to Pakistan as it would minimize its dependence on Pakistan. It is in response to the establishment of Gwadar Port by China in Pakistan. The proximity of Gwadar Port to Chahbahar Port, just 72 kilometers away, has significant implications for India's geopolitical and economic interests in the region.⁴²

Indian Naval Modernization

As discussed earlier, India began upgrading its navy over a decade ago. This involved investing billions in advanced military technology, making India the fourth-largest military power with a substantial defense budget. The defense budget for 2023-2024 has notably increased, especially the naval defense budget,⁴³ which saw a significant 45 per cent rise in 2022 alone.⁴⁴ According to SIPRI, New Delhi ranked third in military spending in 2022. This boost aims to improve maritime assets and capabilities, aligning with India's goal of enhancing military strength.⁴⁵ The former naval Chief stressed the need for India to modernize its navy

⁴⁰ "Indian Navy Enhances Surveillances in North / Central Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden," Ministry of Defense, last modified December 31, 2023, Press Release: Press Information Bureau.

⁴¹ "Sagar Mala New Dimensions in Coastal Economy" Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, <https://shipmin.gov.in/sites/default/files/sagarmala-eng.pdf>.

⁴² "India Inks 10-year Deal to Operate Iran's Chahbahar Port," *Reuters*, May 13, 2024, India inks 10-year deal to operate Iran's Chahbahar port | Reuters.

⁴³ "Defence Budget 2024 Comparison: How India's Defence Allocation for Armed Forces Stack up Against China and Pakistan," *Economic Times*, Defence Budget 2024 Comparison: How India's defence allocation for armed forces stack up against China and Pakistan (indiatimes.com).

⁴⁴ "India's Efforts to Strengthen Indian Ocean Security," *CFR*, India's Efforts to Strengthen Indian Ocean Security | Council on Foreign Relations (cfr.org).

⁴⁵ Malik Qasim Mustafa, "Indian Defense Budget 2023-2024: An Assessment, *ISSI*, IB_Qasim_Feb_23_2023.pdf.

swiftly to match China's higher naval spending, considering China's much larger GDP compared to India's defense budget.⁴⁶

As part of naval modernization endeavors, India is actively strengthening its diplomatic role. By engaging in various platforms, India is securing a stronger position in the region. For instance, India is a key member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), and Colombo Security Conclave.⁴⁷ Additionally, through joint exercises, India strengthens ties with neighboring littoral countries, advancing regional cooperation and solidarity. With a robust presence in the IOR, India is evolving into a key security provider, collaborating with its Quad partners and maritime allies.⁴⁸ India's strong military presence and capabilities in the region grant it a significant advantage and influence over neighboring countries.⁴⁹ Further, India focused on the transition from "Look East" to "Act Policy." Modi's visit to coastal states signifies the promotion of increased cooperation and economic activity.⁵⁰

India's strategic military footprint in the region is further reinforced by the tri-service theatre command headquartered in Port Blair, Andaman, and Nicobar Islands. India's nearness to the Malacca Straits enables it to keep an eye on China's activities in the ocean and to safeguard its security interests in Southeast Asia.⁵¹ To bolster its maritime security and counterbalance Chinese influence, India has created the Information Fusion Center (IFC) which centralizes information from coastal radar stations across the Indian Ocean.

Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean

The Indian Navy actively patrols in the Indian Ocean to deal with piracy threats and safeguard its SLOCs. In recent years, the Indian navy has undergone modernization efforts, reflecting the policymakers' and naval strategists' commitment to upgrading its capabilities. India aspires to establish itself as a world-class blue water navy, leveraging its strategic

⁴⁶ Harsh V Pant, *The Rise of the Indian Navy Internal Vulnerabilities, External Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2016), *The Rise of the Indian Navy: Harsh V. Pant - Book2look*.

⁴⁷ Manjari Chatterjee Miller and Clare Harris, "India's Efforts to Strengthen Indian Ocean Security," *CFR*, July 18, 2023, *India's Efforts to Strengthen Indian Ocean Security | Council on Foreign Relations*.

⁴⁸ Samir Bhattacharya, "India is Embracing a Net Security Provider Role in the Indian Ocean Region," *The Diplomat*, March 8, 2024, *India Is Embracing a 'Net Security Provider' Role in the Indian Ocean Region - The Diplomat*.

⁴⁹ Issac B. Kardon, "Geostrategic Competition for Military Basing in the Indian Ocean," *Brookings*, February 2023, *Geostrategic competition for military basing in the Indian Ocean region*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 12.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 6-7.

geographical position to counter naval threats, particularly from China, and to increase its presence in the IOR. Notably, Pannikar stressed India's dominance in the Indian Ocean a long time ago, as according to him, the future of India will be decided on the sea. Similarly, Keshav Vaidya, another Indian naval thinker advocated for India to extend its naval control beyond its coasts to distant waters.⁵² Moreover, the Indian political leaders have continuously encouraged the importance of readiness to confront the two-front conflict with China and Pakistan.⁵³

India's Naval Advancements

India has made notable strides in the IOR. New Delhi marked a milestone with the launch of its first indigenous submarine, INS Arihant, in 2009. Subsequently, in 2016, the country unveiled its second indigenous submarine, the Arighaat. In 2021, the third nuclear submarine was launched. Recently, on October 16, 2024, India launched its fourth submarine, which is considered the most powerful nuclear ballistic missile submarine. The unveiling of this new submarine added further deterrence and enhanced India's naval ability.⁵⁴

India's naval presence has expanded with the establishment of a base in the Agalega islands, located in Mauritius. This base would increase India's potential by strengthening its position in the Southwestern region of the Indian Ocean.⁵⁵ This will optimize the operational capabilities of the P-81 maritime surveillance fleet, enabling it to undertake a range of tasks, including anti-sub, marine, and anti-surface warfare, and ISR operations.⁵⁶

The Indian defence budget and its trends reflect that India is pursuing a constant drive to expand its military machine. India's offensive military posture and its increase in the defence budget, particularly the budget allocated for the navy, have implications for Pakistan.

⁵² Pant, *The Rise of the Indian Navy: Internal Vulnerabilities, External Challenges*

⁵³ Mustafa, "Indian Defense Budget 2023-2024: An Assessment," 4.

⁵⁴ MI News Network, "India Launches its Most Powerful Nuclear Ballistic Missile Submarine," *Marine Insight*, October 23, 2024, India Launches Its Most Powerful Nuclear Ballistic Missile Submarine.

⁵⁵ "Indian Navy's Offshore Patrol Vessel, INS Sharda, Reinforces Maritime Cooperation with Mauritius," Force, September 19, 2023, Indian Navy's Offshore Patrol Vessel, Ins Sharda, Reinforces Maritime Cooperation With Mauritius.

⁵⁶ Sudha Ramachandran, "India's Maritime Power Projection in the Southwest Indian Ocean Gets a Boost," *The Diplomat*, March 8, 2024, India's Maritime Power Projection in the Southwest Indian Ocean Gets a Boost – The Diplomat/ "India Expands its Naval Presence with Planned Base,"

Critics' Response to Indian Naval Modernization

India's naval expansion has drawn significant attention, with critics expressing concerns. New Delhi asserts that its growing naval engagements are spearheading an initiative to bolster Indian naval capabilities, securing its security and economic interest, for instance, to counter the threat posed by Houthi rebels and Somalian Sea pirates, and to ensure the smooth flow of trade, as 95 percent of its trade passes through the IO.⁵⁷

India's New Naval Base and its Connections to Maldives Tensions

As part of its comprehensive naval modernization strategy, India has successfully established a new naval base in the Lakshadweep Islands. In the wake of recent tensions between India and the Maldives, the presence of this base in the Arabian Sea poses certain challenges to Pakistan.

Previous governments had better relations with the Maldives. The former President Ibrahim Solih's policy was focused towards India; after assuming power, he paid his visit to India.⁵⁸ Before that, under former President Yameen's government, the tilt had been towards China. Since 2009, Chinese influence began to grow in the Maldives, with significant investments in infrastructural projects and financial aid. Before China's investments, India made major investments, making it the leading developmental partner. India established institutions in the Maldives like Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, Indira Gandhi Friendship Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies, and Faculty of Engineering Technology. In 2014, India was among the first responders to the acute water shortage crisis.⁵⁹

In 1982, Indo-Maldives relations experienced an episode of tense relations, when then President Gayoom's brother Adbullah Hameed declared Minicoy Island part of Maldives. However, the former President assured India that he does not support his brother's claims, clarifying that Maldives had no political claims on the island, linking it to cultural and historical connections.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Andrew Orchard, "What Does China Think About India's Increased Anti-Piracy Patrols Amid the Red Sea Crisis," *The Diplomat*, February 10, 2024, What Does China Think About India's Increased Anti-Piracy Patrols Amid the Red Sea Crisis? – The Diplomat.

⁵⁸ E. Dilipraj and Cyriac S. Pampackal, "India-Maldives Relations: Revival of a Historic Partnership," *Center for Air Power Studies*, January 14, 2019, 2, Issue Brief AUGUST 2018 (capsindia.org).

⁵⁹ Ibid, 2-3.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 2.

The Maldives' proximity to India's West Coast its location near the important maritime corridors in the Indian Ocean, and its potential to host another country's navy, contribute to its strategic importance for India. It is situated at a distance of 70 nautical miles from Minicoy and 300 nautical miles from India's West Coast.

India and Maldives had been enjoying good relations before the recent elections. In 2021, India became Maldives' third largest trading partner. Moreover, Maldives has been a major tourist destination for Indians. Both countries have collaborated in different sectors, mainly, in defence and security. Reports indicate that New Delhi offers training opportunities to the Maldivian National Defence Force, fulfilling the requirement of around 70 percent of their defence training needs. However, the close relations between India and Maldives took a turn with the onset of heated arguments between ministers from both sides.⁶¹ Tensions escalated after the change in leadership in Maldives with the arrival of the new President, Mohamed Muizzu. The new president came into power with the slogan "India Out," the country's growing alignment towards China post-election has strained relations. The shift was triggered by derogatory remarks exchanged between the ministers of both sides, which led to the political level. In response, India boycotted the tourism to the Maldives. Muizzu also commanded India to replace military personnel with civilian technical staff.⁶²

Construction of New Naval Base Close to Maldives

In a strategic move amidst tensions with the Maldives, India built a naval base on Minicoy Island, the INS Jatayu on the Lakshadweep archipelago, enhancing its maritime surveillance and security capabilities. It must be noted that it already operates a strategic naval base in this archipelago titled INS Dweeprakshak on Kavaratti Island.⁶³ India commissioned its first base in the archipelago in 2012, enabling it to monitor the activities of Pakistan, China, and Maldives effectively.⁶⁴

The INS Jatayu holds great significance as it represents an upgraded base. It is an important milestone to enhance its capability and

⁶¹ ClearIAS Team, "India-Maldives Relations," Modified on January 2024, India-Maldives Relations – ClearIAS.

⁶² Bidishah Saha, "Why is India Building a Naval Base in the Lakshadweep," *India Today*, March 5, 2024, Explainer: Why is India building a naval base in the Lakshadweep? - India Today.

⁶³ "India to Build a New Naval Base Close to Maldives Amid Tensions over China Ties," *The Indian Express*, India to build new naval base close to Maldives amid tensions over China ties | India News - The Indian Express.

⁶⁴ "Why INS Jatayu, India's New Naval Base in Lakshadweep Matters," *The Indian Express*, Why INS Jatayu, India's new naval base in Lakshadweep, matters | Explained News - The Indian Express.

augment its foothold in the region.⁶⁵ This development would not only strengthen the already existing military resources in the Lakshadweep archipelago but⁶⁶ also elevate India's power in the Western Arabian Sea.⁶⁷ Additionally, through this initiative, India seeks to solidify its position as a net security provider in the Arabian Sea, further strengthening its position.⁶⁸

Strategic Location of Minicoy Island

Minicoy Island occupies a strategic vantage point, lying at the southern tip of Lakshadweep,⁶⁹ and India's Southwestern coast and at a distance of 80 miles from Maldives.⁷⁰

Implications for Pakistan

The establishment of the naval base, the INS Jatayu in the Lakshadweep archipelago has certain implications for Pakistan. For instance, this move would strengthen India's foothold in the IOR, empowering New Delhi and eventually posing a threat to Pakistan's interests.

Importance of Indian Ocean for Pakistan

Pakistan lies to the north of the Indian Ocean. Pakistan's coastline along the Indian Ocean borders the Arabian Sea. The Indian Ocean holds immense importance for Pakistan as 95% of its trade flows through the Karachi Port and Qasim Port, both located in the Indian Ocean Region.⁷¹ Pakistan shares a coastline of around 990km long.⁷² The country heavily relies on maritime trade for both imports and exports. Pakistan's geographical proximity to the Strait of Hormuz enhances the strategic

⁶⁵ "INS Jatayu Lakshadweep gets its Second Strategic Naval Base in Minicoy," ANI News, You Tube, April, Bing Videos.

⁶⁶ Michael Kugelman, "India Expands its Naval Presence with Planned Base," *Foreign Policy*, March 6, 2024, India Expands Its Naval Presence With Planned Base – Foreign Policy.

⁶⁷ "India to Build a New Naval Base Close to Maldives."

⁶⁸ Kugelman, "India Expands its Naval Presence with Planned Base," *Foreign Policy*, March 6, 2024.

⁶⁹ "INS Jatayu Lakshadweep gets its Second Strategic Naval Base in Minicoy."

⁷⁰ Kugelman, "India Expands its Naval Presence with Planned Base."

⁷¹ Abdul Sattar Rahuja, "Maritime Economy of Pakistan," *Pakistan Today*, March 26, 2020,

⁷² Mahvash Haider Ali and Ruxshin Cyrus Dinshaw, *A Handbook on Pakistan's Coastal and Marine Resources* (Pakistan: Daccan Printers, 2016), 7

value of ports like Gwadar, allowing efficient trade with neighboring countries and regions.⁷³

Security Dilemma Triggered by Establishment of INS Jatayu

The changing strategic dynamics of the IOR have certain implications for Pakistan, particularly the Indian naval modernization. Pakistan, being a security-maximizing state, faces security threats from India's naval advancements. As provided by Robert Jervis, the power dynamics between the two countries are inversely related, meaning one country's gain is the other's loss. Pakistan faces a Security Dilemma due to India's naval upgradation, intensified by the commissioning of a new naval base in the Arabian Sea. Empowering India has created an insecure clout for Pakistan.⁷⁴ India already has a geographical edge over Pakistan, as due to its advantageous geographical location, India can establish bases and bolster its influence in the region compared to Pakistan.

Following the principles of Defensive Realism, which provides that states are security-maximizing entities given the anarchic state of the international system, the establishment of a naval base on the Minicoy Island triggers security concerns for Pakistan. To augment regional defense, Pakistan must prioritize maximizing its security by reevaluating its approach towards the IOR. In response to the perceived threat, Pakistan may need to reassess its strategic positioning and consider diplomatic measures to maintain regional stability amidst India's developments in the IOR.

The UN proclaimed the Indian Ocean Region as a Zone of Peace in 1971, faces the risk of transformation into a zone of conflict given the geopolitical competition and the recent Indian developments. The INS Jatayu is commissioned on the largest island of Lakshadweep, the Minicoy. India's strategic plans include the establishment of a jetty, a new airstrip, and some other military ventures to ensure the base's smooth functioning. Major trade from the Persian Gulf and Suez Canal to East Asia and Southeast Asia passes along the Channels between Maldives and Minicoy Island. With the new base, India aims to strengthen its control over the region, extending up to the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the Cape of Good Hope. Additionally, the Arabian Sea offers access to the Strait of Hormuz along these channels. The Security Dilemma may drive towards arms

⁷³ Syed Kamran Hamid Hashmi, Babar Bilal Haider and Iram Zahid, "Major Power Interests in IOR and Implications for the Region, *Paradigm Shift*, April 6, 2024, Major Powers' Interests in IOR And Implications For the Region - Paradigm Shift

⁷⁴ Kugelman, "India Expands its Naval Presence with Planned Base."

proliferation and encourage more increased cooperation between Pakistan and China.⁷⁵

Considering the strategic location of INS Jatayu, it has the potential to strengthen India's ties with African nations, thereby, enhancing regional stability and potentially increasing Pakistan's insecurity. However, given the strained relations of Maldives with India, and Maldives' tilt towards China, it could indirectly benefit Pakistan. While India's advancements in the IOR pose certain challenges to Pakistan, they also offer opportunities. For instance, these developments could deepen the collaboration between Pakistan and China, as previously mentioned. Furthermore, there might be a way to improve relations with Maldives, a crucial actor in the Indian Ocean's geopolitical landscape due to its strategic positioning.

Conclusion

The Indian Ocean Region assumes paramount importance in the twenty-first century, driven by its unique strategic placement. Today, it has become a focal point for many nation-states, particularly major powers, who view their prospects as tied to their influence in this area. All the major stakeholders are in a state of constant competition to have greater influence in the region. In particular, India is increasing its naval power to enhance its dominance. Realizing the Indian Ocean's pivotal role in contemporary geopolitics, New Delhi is pursuing naval modernization vigorously. A primary driver of India's naval modernization is the escalation of Chinese maritime activity in the region. Perceiving a threat from China's rise in naval capabilities, India is adopting certain strategies to augment its naval strength.

India's expanding naval power, coupled with its proximity to Pakistan, raises significant security concerns for Pakistan. India operates several naval bases across the Indian Ocean, including the recently inaugurated facility on Minicoy Island in the Lakshadweep archipelago. The commissioning of another naval base, INS Jatayu, in the Arabian Sea, following a bit strained relations with Maldives following the arrival of the new President in Maldives, further enhances India's maritime capabilities and exacerbates Pakistan's security fears.

In this context, Pakistan, as a security-maximizing state, must prioritize strengthening its position in the region. While challenges abound, this situation also presents opportunities for Pakistan. Improved relations with Maldives could emerge, especially as Pakistan and China collaborate in the Indian Ocean, particularly with the new pro-China government in Maldives.

⁷⁵ Mukesh Kumar, "Lakshadweep and Agalega: Implications of India's Dominance," *South Asian Voices*, April 15, 2024,

